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ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY
OF THE
ANCIENT NEAR EAST**

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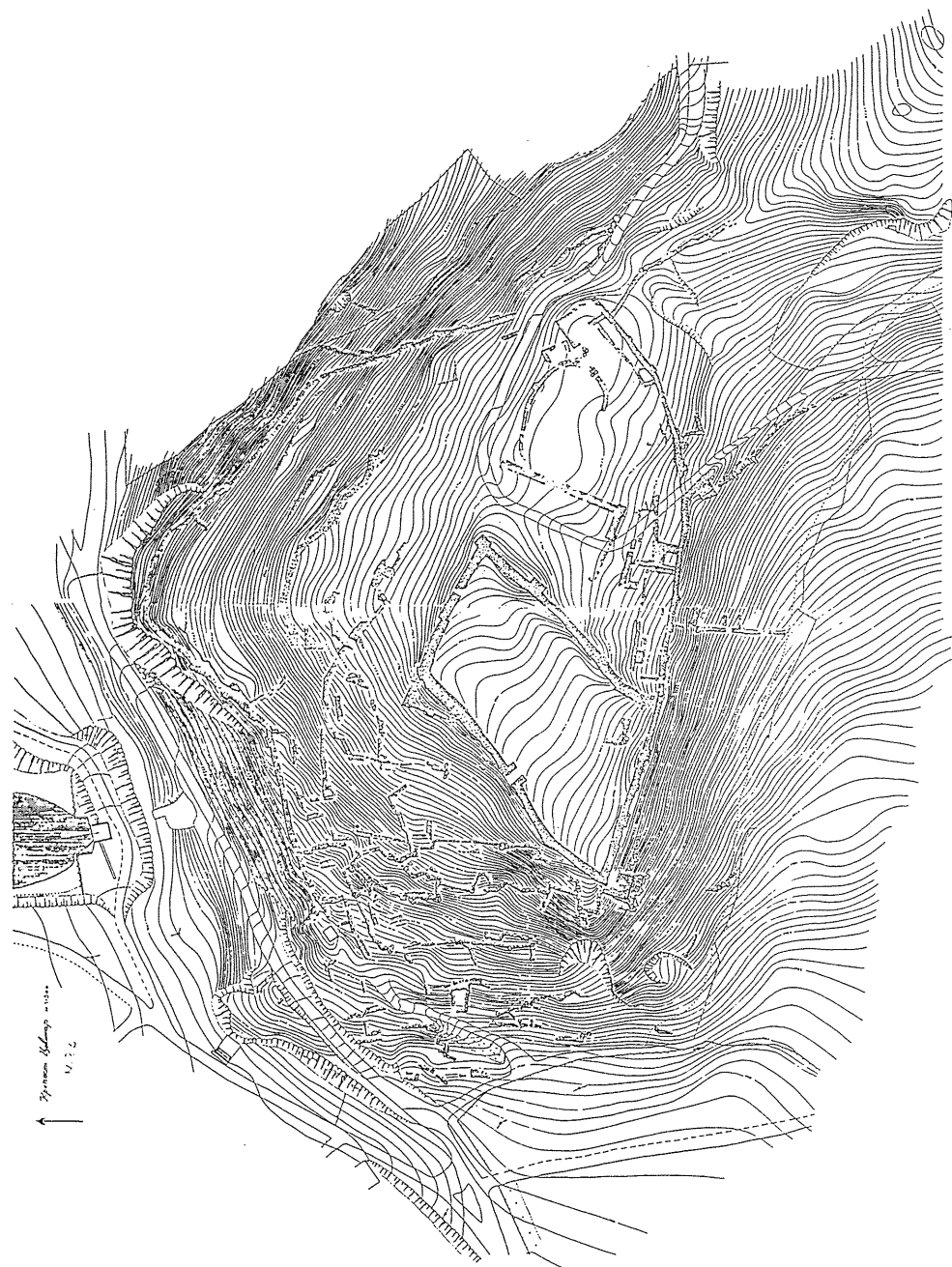


Fig. 6 Tsovinar, the main Urartian fortress in the surveyed area. A keep, the main wall with buttresses, the well-preserved corners and the complex of substruction walls on the southern side of the hill are visible (H. Sanamyan, surveyor Zh. Shekryan).

Achaemenid Art and Animal Style

Burchard Brentjes, Berlin

The relations between the art of the Eurasian steppes and the Achaemenid culture is sometimes discussed in contrary manner - in main they are seen as the cultural influence from Persia in the north, and there is no doubt that there had been Achaemenid influences in the countries around the Black Sea as Caucasia, Pontus, the regions north of the sea and on the Balkans, but they are not so clear in the countries east of the Urals, though they existed there, too. But had it been a stream from one cultural mountain down to the barbarous plains? Is the Scythian art a barbarized version of the Achaemenid art or had it an own character and an independent source which influenced the Iranian highlands in pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid times?

The culture of the Scytho-Sakian animal style was older than the Achaemenid one which cannot be dated before the builder of the empire Cyrus II (III?), while the animal style of the nomads of the steppes was there before. The "Scythian" trends in the so-called "Sakkiz treasure" were believed by R. Ghirshmann as the proof that this type of art was invented in Northwestern Iran, but for me they demonstrate the full-developed Scythian animal style, although that is not of so big use, because the source is doubtful. The name "Sakkiz treasure" is conventional and the dates of the single pieces are open. Sure is only that they are pre-Achaemenid. The connection of those pieces with the Scythian invasion south and west of the Caspian Sea cannot be doubted, if they are genuine at all.

There is a complex of cultural elements inside Achaemenid culture which have no prototypes in Iran, but they are parallels to the basic structures of the animal style of the steppes. There are of course bigger parts of non-nomadic character as in architecture and other kinds of art, but the famous relief in Persepolis and on the front relief of the royal graves reflect the strong "northern" element in Achaemenid culture. The first item is the so-called "Median" dress with jacket, trousers, and boots, but it is the dress of the horse-riding groups as well inside the Persian-Median state and army as of the ethnical groups in the northern provinces of the Achaemenid Empire. The so-called "Persian dress" with a long floating shirt was the traditional habit of the warrior fighting from upon the chariot and was not suitable for horseback and the warrior had to accept the trousers, when he changed from the chariot to the horseback. A similar process happened in China, when Wu-ti ordered his army to take the nomadic dress for the riding units. The riding habit could not be proved before their representation on the reliefs of Darius and it is quite unclear, when it was adopted.

Achaemenid animal style appears on the relief of Persepolis and in several original pieces with animal heads or complete figures, rings for the

necks and smaller plaques and vases with handles in form of animals and other things more'. In these cases it seems to me that they were developed in the Achaemenid Empire, though arm-rings are common in the steppes, too.

Difficult to decide is the primacy in the bow cases. The Persepolis reliefs show two types - one was carried on the shoulder, the other one hang at the belt. They were not connected with one of the two forms of dresses and both and also some others were used in the steppes, too, as shown by metal or bone fitting of bow bags found between the Danube and the Altai.

The relief at Persepolis contain other evidences of connections between the Persian Empire and the tribes in the north. The *akinakes*, the short sword of the Achaemenids, was a new arm shorter than the Assyrian sword and the decoration as well as the form of the dagger and the scabbard fastened to the leg were taken from the steppes. The decoration of the Achaemenid weapon could be studied on the relief found on the treasury representing Darius and his followers and between them the royal arms' carrier. He wears a richly decorated *akinakes* like several originals from the Scythian tombs in Southern Russia for instance in Chertomlyk.² The chape is decorated like other chapes on the relief with the head of a canid, while the body is transformed into geometric ornaments. Stucky saw it as a shortened version of a lion above a sheep³, which is possible, but the "normal" chape in Northern Caucasia and the steppes shows the famous "curled animal".⁴ There are rare chapes with two lions as in Kelermes and Melgunov barrows and the one from the "Sakkiz treasure" looks like a stylisation, but they are exceptions from the normal type which we could date by the Sardis example before 650 BC.⁵ like the one found at Karmir Blur which should be at least older than 585, the presumed date of destruction of this site. The "curled" animal is a type from the animal style of the steppe going back to the curled dragons of East and Northeast Asia which started to be represented in art in the 4th millenium BC. In the 1st mill. BC it seems to be in main the wolverine, the giant marten of the holoarctic, while in China it looks sometimes like an alligator or giant salamander.

The royal bearer of the arms on the treasury relief carries in his hand a strange type of a representative battleaxe with a bird's head decoration. There might have been connections with the Luristan tradition, but I prefer to compare it with the representative hammers or axes and pickaxes of the steppe tribes, as they were found at Kelermes, Aksyuntinca, L'vovo and at other sites, which had a Siberian tradition since the Bronze Age and were used in the Tagar period of Siberia.⁶ One of those "Siberian" pickaxes was found in a "Cimmerian" grave in Asia Minor - as the chapes in Caucasia older than the classical "Scythian" complex. The pickaxe was found in a grave near Imirler in North Central Anatolia together with a typical

¹ R. Ghirshman, *Iran. Protoiraner. Meder. Achämeniden*, München 1964, figs. 222, 225, 319.

² B. Brentjes, *Waffen der Steppenvölker I. Dolch und Schwert im Steppenraum vom 2. Jahrtausend v.Chr. bis in die alttürkische Zeit (= AMI 26)*, Berlin 1993.

³ R.A. Stucky, *Achämenidische Ortbander: Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1976), pp. 13-23.

⁴ B. Brentjes, *Ortband, Rolltier und Vielfraß. Beobachtungen zur "skythischen" Akinakes-Zier (= AMI 27)*, Berlin 1994, pp. 47-164.

⁵ G.M.A. Hanfmann, *The Eighth Campaign at Sardis: BASOR 182* (1966), pp. 2-34, fig. 9.

⁶ B. Brentjes, *The Arms of the Sakas*, Varanasi 1996, pls. XIX and XX.

akinakes. The next sites where such arms were found are in Northern Caucasia - Pyatigorsk and Gundelen. But the word "Cimmerian" means nothing else than "herders" or "nomads" and is no definition about ethnical or linguistic problems. There was a movement of tribal groups to Asia Minor from the Yenisei region of Siberia at the end of the 2nd millennium BC as shown by art and ceramics which permit to see a relation with the Eastern Siberian Bronze Age, the Karasuk culture. It was distributed from Manchuria to the Altai and was presumably based on the specific agriculture of Northern China.⁷ It used the frozen soil of permafrost and the frozen soil in winter in Northern China preserving the humidity of precipitation in wintertime which is relatively low, but it is available during the period of vegetation. These conditions let the Karasuk culture flourish during the warmer period of the 2nd millennium BC, a time of agriculture in Western Siberia, too, when the Andronovo culture was a time of permanent settlements which was forced later on to move south- and westwards by a climatic disaster late in the 2nd millennium making agriculture impossible and changing Western Siberia into a nomadic area. The southern borders of the taiga was pushed southwards for about 250 to 300 km and the former settlements were deserted.⁸ The Karasuk tribes came under pressure, too, by the desertification of their southern areas, so that today half of their former region is covered by sand. A part of them transcrossed the Altai and settled in the Yenisei valley⁹ which was left by the Andronovo peoples. Their agriculture could resist for a while the worsened weather there. Some times later in the 10th to the 8th centuries BC ceramics of Karasuk type aside the Syr Darya and in Caucasia¹⁰ existed together with the mentioned elements of animal style.¹²

The influence of climatic oscillations is defended as refused by a lot of archaeologists. One of the reasons of this difference is that both sides do not discuss the fundamental difference between climate and weather. Climate is a middle value without mentioning the local realisations of weather, and weather changed like today from season to season and from day to day, especially in the humid areas. As in the present Europe where exists a relatively stable climate the weather changes, from France to Poland etc. - the reason is the fact that the circulation of air follows tendencies based on the input of solar energy, the distribution of oceans and continents and the relief of the continents. The ruling system depends on the rotation of earth forcing the atmosphere to move from west to east - producing the westerlies - except above the pole regions and countered by a reverse movement, the passats, diverted by the continents meeting an equatorial westerly again. Additionally, high temperature differences between the oceans and the

⁷ V. Ünal, *Zwei Gräber eurasiatischer Reiternomaden im nördlichen Zentralanatolien, BAV 4* (1982), München 1983, pp. 81-96, fig. 1.

⁸ E.A. Novgorodova, *Central'naya Aziya i karasukskaya problema*, Moscow 1970, fig. 1.

⁹ M.F. Kosarev, *Drevnii kul'tury tomsko-narymskogo Priobya*, Moscow 1974, fig. 2.

¹⁰ Novgorodova, 1970, fig. 51.

¹¹ C.M.P. Gryaznov, *O chernoloshchenoy Keramike Kavkaza, Kazakhstana i Sibiri v Epokhu pozdney Bronzy, Kratkie Soobshcheniya o dokladakh i polevykh Issledovaniyakh Instituta Archeologii* 108 (1966), pp. 31-34.

¹² E.N. Chernykh - S.V. Kuz'minykh, *Drevnyaya Metallurgiya severnoy Evrazii*, Moscow 1989, figs. 31, 62, 66, 67, etc.

continents form the seasonal monsoons. The strength and the directions, the way of passage of atmospheric movements depend on the climate, so that during the Ice Ages the Indian and the China monsoons did not exist. The westerlies did not give up, but went a more southerly way, not in a straight line. Today the westerlies coming from Central America to Europe reach the mountains of Norway, get diverted to south-west, pass Great Britain, the coastal lines of France and Spain to West Africa, where they meet the equatorial air system, return through Morocco to South and West Europe and pass on to the Baltic Sea, diverted again, one part to south-east, the other to north-east forming the rain-bearing clouds over North Siberia and bringing rain to the Middle East. There they are swinging out over Iran meeting the monsoons from the Indian Ocean.

A colder climate will make Asia Minor, West Syria and the Iranian mountains an arid area, while North Africa and the southern parts of the Middle East will receive more precipitations. In warmer periods than nowadays the areas of South Palestine, Egypt and parts of Arabia will be watered from two sides, in the south-east by a strengthened monsoon coming from the Indian Ocean and in the western parts by the equatorial westerlies coming far more to north. The consequence is that the archaeologist could find at his excavation site the traces of the local weather and it might be possible to identify it as consequences of climatic changes, but not all changes of weather are due to a climatic oscillation. There are every year a lot of irregularities of weather which we are unable to explain up to now.

Quite another question is the relation between levels of destruction in the explored sites and climatic changes. The destruction - if not caused by an earthquake - is a result of human actions which could be initiated by climatic catastrophes elsewhere, but not on the spot.

The arid zones, the steppes and semi-deserts, are stroke by oscillations much harder and quicker than humid regions or zones of artificial irrigation. The inhabitants of arid areas have to leave, when their habitat is drying up. An irrigation society will enlarge its efforts to irrigate the soil and might strengthen by doing so the salinization of the fields with disastrous consequences at the end of the process covering centuries. Therefore the key word "climatic oscillation" has to be used carefully and it could only explain the main tendencies, scarcely the event at a single site. A climatic interpretation has to recognise at least an extended zone as the relation of steppe and taiga in Siberia.

The materials dating to the early 1st millennium BC could be explained as witnesses of a tribal movement of horse-breeding nomads from the Yenisei area to the west following the exit of Andronovo tribes out of the region. The migration was seen by G. Kossack.¹³ These migrations seem to have been the advance of the Iranians to the Middle East - a second big migration after the first one at the begin of the 2nd millennium BC, the Indo-Iranian migration. That the Andronovo and the Karasuk tribes had had prototypes of an animal style, could be shown with the so-called Seyma-

¹³ G. Kossack, Tli Grab 85. Bemerkungen zum Beginn des skythenzeitlichen Formenkreises im Kaukasus, *KAVA-Beiträge* 5 (1983), pp. 89-170.

Turbino complex, bronzes of the middle of the 2nd millennium BC., daggers decorated with animal figures, rings with animals set inside and others, prototype of the Scythian animal style.¹⁴

The Siberian-Central Asian wave of the early 1st millennium BC influenced the Western Iranians at least in the northern part, but even in the arms on the Persepolis relief appear typical Sauromatic or Old Sarmatian forms, as the dagger with a pommel in the shape of a "half-moon" (Fig. 1), so at the grave VI of Persepolis (Fig. 2). At least the material culture of the northern provinces of the Achaemenid Empire was a nomadic one as the dress and arms of the Persepolis relief demonstrate. Even the royal arms of Darius stood in the tradition of the steppes and not the nomads copied the Persians, though the empire developed its culture from many sources.

That the contacts between the steppes and the regions of the Near East were older than the Achaemenid art can be proved by several items. Only one will be presented here - the ^{KuS}Kurša of the Hittites - the golden fleece of the Greeks as a nomadic symbol of fertility and royalty. In the royal cult of the Hittites a big role is played by fleeces from sheep and goats. Such ^{KuS}Kurša were deified written with the determination DINGIR = god. These fleeces were used in the royal festival in springtime or were named "Zithkhariya", the protecting goddess.¹⁵ They were adored in the temple of the god of war Zababa and connected with the god Inara. The fleeces were kept in the "house of fleeces" at Hattusha and were taken with during military campaigns. Haas quotes from the myth of Telepinu: "Telepinu provided the king. In front of Telepinu was erected an *eya*-tree. On the tree hangs a fleece of a sheep. Put into it are fat, barley, corn, and wine, then are added cow and sheep, then are put into it long live and descendants, then is added the right leg (of a lamb), then are put it increase (?), prosperity and safety." Haas explained: "Concret we have to imagine that hieroglyphs of these different conceptions were either written on the fleece or were fixed as models to it".

We could conceive it, too, as a sack made from fleece or leather. Haas mentioned that the "primary meaning is *askos*, leather-bag". The connection of ^{KuS}Kurša with the king explains the Greek myth about the golden fleece often represented in Greek art. The royal symbol of the Hittites seems to be represented only in reliefs narrating the expedition of Ramses II in Syria. They illustrate the Palestinian and Syrian towns attacked by the Egyptian army. Three of them show above the town a pole with a sack-like emblem with three arrows shot into it by the pharaoh himself, while the picture with the town of Qadesh shows the emblem without arrows. The explanation for that is that Qadesh had not been occupied, but the other three towns were taken by Ramses - and the three arrows symbolized this fact. The enemies of Ramses were the Hittites and these sacks are ^{KuS}Kurša - the symbols of the king's rule (Figs. 3, 4).

¹⁴ Brentjes, 1993, figs. 35, 40, 41, etc.

¹⁵ B. Brentjes, Der hethitische Königsfötisch ^{KuS}Kurša auf ägyptischen Reliefs der Ramessidenzeit, *AoF* 22 (1995), pp. 334-347; V. Haas, Medea und Jason im Lichte hethitischer Quellen, *Acta Academica Scientiarum Hungarica* 36 (1978), pp. 241-253 and Recension to G. McMahon, *The Hittite State Cult of the Tutelary Deities*, Chicago 1991, *AJO* 38-39 (1991-1992), pp. 209-213.

The fleece as royal symbol connected with the fertility bringing spring might explain, too, the mysterious Scythian pectoral found in the Tolstaya Mogila. The central group of its decoration shows two men preparing a fleece for a ritual (Fig. 5).

The prototype of this royal emblem could have been the royal bag for his bow decorated in Scythia several times with golden pictures in animal style (Fig. 6). The preference of deer in Scythian art reminds of the Telipinu *rhyton* in the Schimmel collection in form of a tame stag. It is decorated with a scene of adoration with a young god upon a stag, a goddess sitting on a stool with stag-like feet and a sleeping stag under a tree, where a quiver hangs together with a bag which might be such an adored fleece.

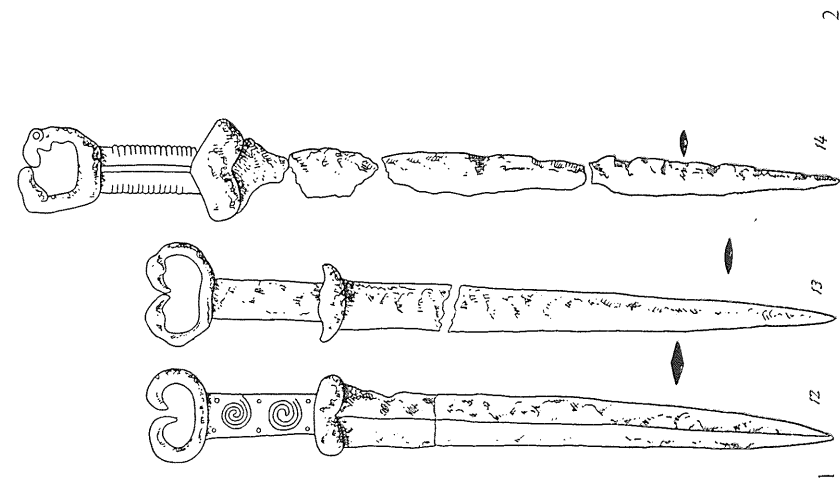


Fig. 1 Short swords from Scytho-Sarmatian graves. 12: Zhurovka. 13: from a collection. 14: Zhurovka, kurgan 401. Accord. to A.I. Melvukova. Vooruzhenie Skifov: Arkheologiya SSSR. 20. 12-14, D 1-4.

Fig. 2 A Sarmatian sword on a relief at the grave VI. Photo: B. Grunewald. 1982 - 105. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Berlin.

